

MASTER SKYLARK.

BY JOHN BENNETT.

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CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE RIDE.

RAT-A-TAT-TAT at the first dim hint of dawn went the chamberlain's knuckles upon the door. To Nick it seemed scarce midnight yet, so sound had been his sleep.

Master Carew having gotten into his high-topped riding-boots with a great puffing and tugging, they washed their faces at the inn-yard pump by the smoky light of the hostler's lantern, and then in a subdued, half-wakened way made a hearty breakfast off the fragments of the last night's feast. Part of the remaining cold meat, cheese, and cakes Carew stowed in his leather pouch. The rest he left in the lap of a beggar sleeping beside the door.

The street was dim with a chilly fog, through which a few pale stars still struggled overhead. The houses were all shut and barred; nobody was abroad, and the night-watch slept in comfortable doorways here and there, with lolling heads and lanterns long gone out. As they came along the crooked street, a stray cat scurried away with scared green eyes, and a kenneled hound set up a lonesome howl.

But the Blue Boar Inn was stirring like an ant-hill, with firefly lanterns flitting up and down, and a cheery glow about the open door. The horses of the company, scrubbed unreasonably clean, snorted and stamped in little bridled clumps about the court-yard, and the stable-boys, not scrubbed at all, clanked at the pump or shook out wrinkled saddle-cloths with most prodigious yawns. The grooms were buckling up the packs; the chamberlain and sleepy-lidded maids stood at the door, waiting their farewell farthings.

Some of the company yawned in the tap-room; some yawned out of doors with steam-

ing stirrup-cup in hand; and some came yawning down the stairways pulling on their riding-cloaks, booted, spurred, and ready for a long day's ride.

"Good-morrow, sirs," said Carew heartily. "Good-morrow, sir, to you," said they, and all came over to speak to Nicholas in a very kindly way: and one or two patted him on the cheek and walked away speaking in undertones among themselves, keeping one eye on Carew all the while. And Master Tom Heywood, the play-writer, came out with a great slice of fresh wheat bread, thick with butter and dripping with yellow honey, and gave it to Nick; and stood there silently with a very queer expression watching him eat it, until Carew's groom led up a stout hackney and a small roan palfrey to the block, and the master-player, crying impatiently "Up with thee, Nick, we must be ambling!" sprang into the saddle of the gray.

The sleepy inn-folk roused a bit to send a cheery volley of, "Fare ye well, sirs, come again," after the departing players, and the long cavalcade cantered briskly out of the inn-yard, in double rank, with a great clinking of bridle-chains and a drifting odor of wet leather and heavy perfume.

Nick sat very erect and rode his best, feeling like some errant knight of the great Round Table, ready to right the whole world's wrongs. "But what about the horse?" said he. "We can na keep him in Stratford, sir."

"Oh, that's all seen to," said the master-player. "'T is to be sent back by the weekly carrier."

"And where do I turn into the Stratford road, sir?" asked Nick, as the players clattered down the cobbled street in a cloud of mist that steamed up so thickly from the stones that the horses seemed to have no legs, but to float like boats.

"Some distance further on," replied Carew

carelessly. "'T is not the way we came that thou shalt ride to-day; that is t' other end of town, and the gate not open yet. But the longest way round is the shortest way home, so let 's be spurring on."

At the corner of the street a cross and sleepy cobbler was strapping a dirty urchin, who belovved lustily. Nick winced.

"Hollo!" cried Carew. "What 's to do?"

"Why, sir," said Nick, ruefully, "father will thresh me well this night."

"Nay," said Carew, in a quite decided tone; "that he 'll not, I promise thee!"—and as he spoke he chuckled softly to himself.

The man before them turned suddenly around, and grinned queerly; but, catching the master-player's eye, whipped his head about like a weather-vane in a gale, and cantered on.

As they came down the narrow street the watchmen were just swinging wide the city gates, and gave a cheer to speed the parting guests, who gave a rouse in turn, and were soon lost to sight in the mist which hid the valley in a great gray sea.

"How shall I know where to turn off, sir?" asked Nick, a little anxiously. "'T is all alike."

"I 'll tell thee," said the master-player; "rest thee easy on that score. I know the road thou art to ride much better than thou dost thyself."

He smiled quite frankly as he spoke, and Nick could not help wondering why the man before them again turned around and eyed him with that sneaking grin.

He did not like the fellow's looks. He had scowling black brows, hair cut as close as if the rats had gnawed it off, a pair of ill-shaped bandy-legs, a wide, unwholesome slit of a mouth, and a nose like a raspberry tart. His whole appearance was servile and mean, and there was a sly malice in his furtive eyes. Besides that, and a thing which strangely fascinated Nick's gaze, there was a hole through the gristle of his right ear, scarred about as if it had been burned, and through this hole the fellow had tied a bow of crimson ribbon, like a butterfly alighted upon his ear.

"A pretty fellow!" said Carew, with a shrug. "He 'll be hard-put to dodge the hangman

yet; but he 's a right good fellow in his way, and he has served me—he has served me."

The first loud burst of talk had ceased, and all rode silently along. The air was chill, and Nick was grateful for the cloak that Carew threw around him. There was no sound but the beat of many hoofs in the dust-padded road, and now and then the crowing of a cock somewhere within the cloaking fog. The stars were gone, and the sky was lighting up; and all at once as they rode, the clouds ahead, low down and to the right, broke raggedly away and let a red sun-gleam shoot through across the mist, bathing the riders in dazzling rosy light.

"Why, Master Carew," cried Nick, no little startled, "there comes the sun, almost ahead! We 're riding eastward, sir. We 've missed the road!"

"Oh, no, we 've not," said Carew; "nothing of the sort." His tone was so peremptory and sharp that Nick said nothing more, but rode along, vaguely wishing that he was already clattering down Stratford High Street.

The clouds scattered as the sun came up, and the morning haze drifted away into cool dales, and floated off upon the breeze. And as the world woke up the players wakened, too, and rode gaily along, laughing, singing, and chattering together, until Nick thought he had never in all his life before seen such a jolly fellowship. His heart was blithe as he reined his curveting palfrey by the master-player's side, and watched the sunlight dance and sparkle along the dashing line from dagger-hilts and jeweled clasps, and the mist-lank plumes curl crisp again in the warmth of the rising sun.

The master-player, too, had a graceful, taking way of being half-familiar with the lad; he was besides a marvelous teller of wonderful tales, and whiled away the time with jests and quips, mile after mile, till Nick forgot both road and time, and laughed until his sides were sore.

Yet slowly, as they rode along, it came home to him with the passing of the land that this was country new and strange. So he began to take notice of this and that beside the way; and as he noticed he began to grow uneasy. Thrice had he come to Coventry, but surely never by a road like this.

Yet still the master-player joked and laughed

and pleased the boy with little things — until Nick laughed, too, and let the matter go. At last, however, when they had ridden fully an hour, they passed a moss-grown abbey on the left-hand side of the road, a strange old place that Nick could not recall.

“Are ye sure, Master Carew,” he ventured

dost come without fail to the very place that thou art going. I will, upon my word, and on the remnant of mine honour!”

But in spite of this assurance, and in spite of the master-player’s ceaseless stream of gaiety and marvels, Nick became more and more uneasy. The road was certainly growing stranger



“THEY OVERTOOK HIM AS HE TOPPED THE HILL, AND, LEANING OVER, CAREW SNATCHED THE BRIDLE FROM HIS HAND.”
(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

timidly, “are ye sure we be na going wrong, sir?”

At that the master-player took on so offended an air that Nick was sorry he had spoken.

“Why, now,” said Carew, haughtily, “if thou dost know the roads of England better than I, who have trudged and ridden them all these years, I’ll sit me down and learn of thee how to follow mine own nose. I tell thee I know the road thou art to ride this day better than thou dost thyself; and I’ll see to it that thou

and stranger as they passed. The company, too, instead of ambling leisurely along, as they had done at first, were now spurring ahead at a good round gallop, in answer to a shrill whistle from the master-player; and the horses were wet with sweat.

They passed a country village, too, that was quite unknown to Nick, and a great highway running to the north that he had never seen before; and when they had ridden for about two hours, the road swerved southward to a

shining ford, and on a little tableland beyond he saw the gables of a town he did not know.

"Why, Master Carew!" he cried out, half-indignant, half-perplexed, and thoroughly frightened, "this is na the Stratford road at all. I'm going back. I will na ride another mile!"

As he spoke he wheeled the roan sharply out of the clattering file with a splash of the rein across the withers, and started back along the hill past the rest of the company, who came thumping down behind.

"Stop him! Stop him there!" he heard the master-player shout, and there was something in the fierce, high voice that turned his whole heart sick. What right had they to stop him? This was not the Stratford road; he was certain of that now. But "Stop him!—stop him there!" he heard the master-player call, and a wild, unreasoning fright came over him. He dug his heels into the palfrey's heaving sides and urged him up the hill through the cloud of dust that came rolling down behind the horsemen. The hindmost riders had plunged into those before, and the whole array was struggling, shouting, and wrangling in wild disorder; but out of the flurry Carew and the bandy-legged man with the ribbon in his ear spurred furiously and came galloping after him at the top of their speed.

Nick cried out, and beat the palfrey with the rein; but the chase was short. They overtook him as he topped the hill, one on each side, and, leaning over, Carew snatched the bridle from his hand. "Thou little imp!" he panted, as he turned the roan around and started down the hill. "Don't try this on again!"

"Oh, Master Carew," gasped Nick, "what are ye going to do wi' me?"

"Do with thee?" cried the master-player, savagely clapping his hand upon his poniard,—"why, I am going to do with thee just whatever I please. Dost hear? And, hark 'e, this sort of caper doth not please me at all; and by the whistle of the Lord High Admiral, if thou triest it on again, thy life is not worth a rotten peascod!"

Unbuckling the rein, he tossed one end to the bandy-legged man, and holding the other in his own hand, with Nick riding helplessly between them, they trotted down the hill again,

took their old places in the ranks, and spattered through the shallow ford.

The bandy-legged man had pulled a dagger from beneath his coat, and held it under his bridle-rein, shining through the horse's mane as they dashed through the still half-sleeping town. Nick was speechless with terror.

Beyond the town's end they turned sharply to the northeast, galloping steadily onward for what was perhaps a half an hour, though to Nick it seemed a forever, until they came out into a great highway running southward. "Watling Street!" he heard the man behind him say, and knew that they were in the old Roman road that stretched from London to the north. Still they were galloping, though long strings dribbled from the horses' mouths, and the saddle-leathers dripped with foam. One or two looked back at him and bit their lips; but Carew's eyes were hot and fierce, and his hand was on his poniard. The rest, after a curious glance or two, shrugged their shoulders carelessly, and galloped on: this affair was Master Gaston Carew's business, not theirs.

Until high noon they hurried on with neither stop nor stay. Then they came to a place where a little brook sang through the grass by the roadside in a shady nook beneath some mighty oaks, and there the master-player whistled for a halt, to give the horses breath and rest, and to water them at the brook-pools. Some of the players sauntered up and down to stretch their tired legs, munching meat and bread; and some lay down upon the grass and slept a little. Two of them came, offering Nick some cakes and cheese; but he was crying hard and would neither eat nor drink, though Carew urged him earnestly. Then Master Tom Heywood, with an ugly look at Carew, and without so much as an if-ye-please or a by-your-leave, led Nick up the brook to a spot where it had not been muddied by the horses, and made him wash his dusty face and hands in the cool water and dampen his hair, though he complied as if in a daze. And indeed Nick rode on through the long afternoon, clinging helplessly to the pommel of his saddle, sobbing bitterly, until for very weariness he could no longer sob.

It was after nine o'clock that night when they rode into Towcester, and all that was to

be seen was a butcher's boy carting garbage out of the town and whistling to keep his courage up. The watch had long since gone to sleep about the silent streets, but a dim light burned in the tap-room of the Old Brown Cow; and there the players rested for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DASH FOR FREEDOM.

NICK awoke from a heavy, burning sleep, aching from head to foot. The master-player, up and dressed, stood by the window, scowling grimly out into the ashy dawn. Nick made haste to rise, but could not stifle a sharp cry of pain as he staggered to his feet, he was so racked and sore with riding.

At the boy's smothered cry Carew turned, and his dark face softened with a sudden look of pity and concern. "Why, Nick, my lad," he cried, and hurried to his side, "this is too bad, indeed!" and without more words took him gently in his arms and carried him down to the courtyard well, where he bathed him softly from neck to heel in the cold, refreshing water, and wiped him with a soft, clean towel as tenderly as if he had been the lad's own mother. And having dried him thoroughly, he rubbed him with a waxy ointment that smelled of henbane and poppies, until the aching was almost gone. So soft and so kind was he withal that Nick took heart after a little and asked timidly, "And ye will let me go home to-day, sir, will ye not?"

The master-player frowned.

"Please, Master Carew, let me go."

"Come, come," said Carew impatiently, "enough of this!"—and stamped his foot.

"But, oh, Master Carew," plead Nick, with a sob in his throat, "my mother's heart will surely break if I do na come home!"

Carew started, and his mouth twitched queerly. "Enough, I say—enough!" he cried. "I will not hear; I'll have no more. I tell thee hold thy tongue—be dumb! I'll not have ears—thou shalt not speak! Dost hear?" He dashed the towel to the ground. "I bid thee hold thy tongue."

Nick hid his face between his hands, and leaned against the rough stone wall, a naked,

shivering, wretched little chap indeed. "Oh, mother, mother, mother!" he sobbed pitifully.

A singular expression came over the master-player's face. "I will not hear—I tell thee I will not hear!" he choked; and, turning suddenly away, he fell upon the sleepy hostler, who was drawing water at the well, and rated him outrageously, to that astounded worthy's great amazement.

Nick crept into his clothes, and stole away to the kitchen-door. There was a red-faced woman there who bade him not to cry—"t would soon be breakfast-time. Nick thought he could not eat at all; but when the savory smell crept out and filled the chilly air, his poor little empty stomach would not be denied, and he ate heartily. Master Heywood sat beside him and gave him the choicest bits from his own trencher; and Carew himself, seeing that he ate, looked strangely pleased, and ordered him a tiny mut-ton-pie, well spiced. Nick pushed it back indignantly; but Heywood took the pie and cut it open, saying quietly: "Come, lad, the good God made the sheep that is in this pie, not Gaston Carew. Eat it—come, 't will do thee good!" and saw him finish the last crumb.

From Towcester south through Northamptonshire is a pretty country of rolling hills and undulating hollows, ribboned with pebbly rivers, and dotted with fair parks and tofts of ash and elm and oak. Straggling villages now and then were threaded on the road like beads upon a string, and here and there the air was damp and misty from the grassy fens along some winding stream.

It was against nature that a healthy, growing lad should be so much cast down as not to see and be interested in the strange, new, passing world of things about him; and little by little Nick roused from his wretchedness and began to look about him. And a wonder grew within his brain: why had they stolen him?—where were they taking him?—what would they do with him there?—or would they soon let him go again?

Every yellow cloud of dust arising far ahead along the road wrought up his hopes to a Blue-beard pitch, as regularly to fall. First came a cast-off soldier from the war in the Netherlands, rakishly forlorn, his breastplate full of rusty

dents, his wild hair worn by his steel cap, swaggering along on a sorry hack with an old

of great lords, and fetched a clownish cheer as the players galloped by.

Then the hot dust got into Nick's throat and he began to cough. Carew started with a look of alarm. "Come, come, Nicholas, this will never do—never do in the world; thou 'lt spoil thy voice."

"I do na care," said Nick.

"But I do," said Carew, sharply. "So we 'll have no more of it!" and he clapped his hand upon his poniard. "But, nay—nay, lad, I did not mean to threaten thee—'t is but a jest. Come, smooth thy throat, and do not shriek no more. We play in old St. Albans town to-night, and thou art to sing thy song for us again."

Nick pressed his lips tight shut and shook his head. He would not sing for them again.

"Come, Nick, I've promised Tom Heywood that thou shouldst sing his song; and, lad, there 's no one left in all the land to sing it if thou 'lt not. Tom doth dearly love thee, lad—why, sure, thou hast seen that! And, Nick, I've promised all the company that thou wouldst sing Tom's song with us to-night. 'T will break their hearts if thou wilt not.



"A PEDDLING CHAPMAN LIMPED BY, SULKILY DOFFING HIS HAT."

belt full of pistolets, and his long sword thumping Rosinante's ribs. Then a peddling chapman, with a dust-white pack and a cunning Hebrew look, limped by, sulkily doffing his greasy hat. Two sturdy Midland journeymen in search of southern handicraft, trudged down with tool-bags over their shoulders and stout oak staves in hand. Of wretched beggars and tattered rogues there was an endless string. But of any help no sign.

Here and there, like a moving dot, a ploughman turned a belated furrow; or a sweating ditcher leaned upon his reluctant spade and longed for night; or a shepherd, quite as silly as his sheep, gawked up the morning hills. But not a sign of help for Nick.

Once, passing through a little town, he raised a sudden cry of "Help! Help—they be stealing me away!" But at that the master-player and the bandy-legged man waved their hands and set up such a shout that his shrill outcry was not even heard. And the simple country bumpkins, standing in a grinning row like so many Old Aunt Sallys at a fair, pulled off their caps and bowed, thinking it some company



"TWO STURDY MIDLAND JOURNEMEN, WITH STOUT OAK STAVES IN HAND."

Come, Nick, thou 'lt sing it for us all, and set old Albans town afire!" said Carew, pleadingly.

Nick shook his head.

"Come, Nick," said Carew coaxingly, "we must hear that sweet voice of thine in Albans town to-night. Come, there 's a dear good lad, and give us just one little song! Come, act the man and sing, as thou alone in all the world can sing, in Albans town this night; and on my word, and on the remnant of mine honour, I 'll leave thee go back to Stratford town to-morrow morning!"

"To Stratford—to-morrow?" stammered Nick with a glad, incredulous cry, while his heart leaped up within him.

"Ay, verily; upon my faith as the fine fag-end of a very proper gentleman—thou shalt go back to Stratford town to-morrow if thou wilt but do thy turn with us to-night."

Nick caught the master-player's arm as they rode along, almost crying for very joy: "Oh, that I will, sir—and do my very best. And, oh, Master Carew, I ha' thought so ill o' thee! Forgive me, sir, I did na know thee well."

Carew winced. Hastily throwing the rein to Nick, he left him to master his own array.

As for Nick, as happy as a lark he learned his new lines as he rode along, Master

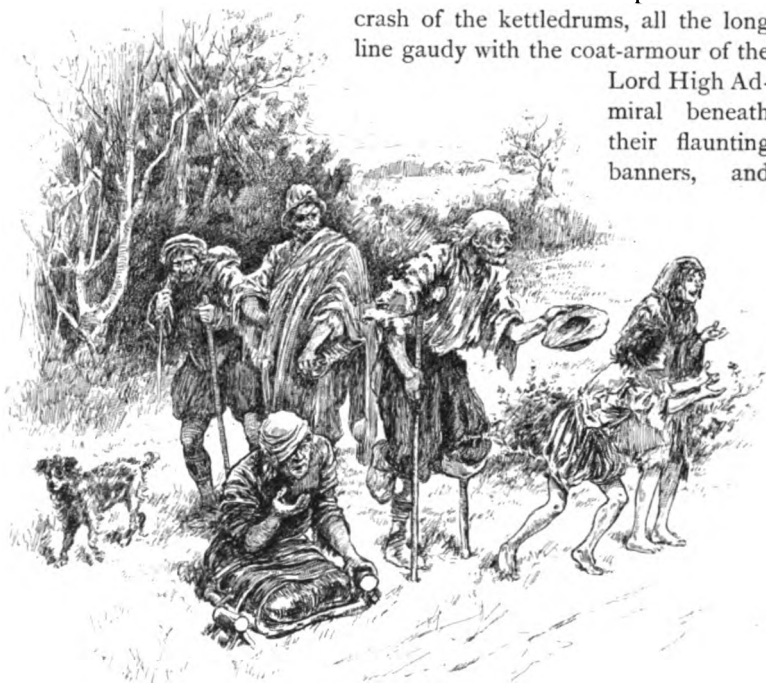
Carew saying them over to him from the manuscript and over again until he made not a single mistake; and was at great pains to teach him the latest fashionable London way of pronouncing all the words, and of emphasizing his set phrases. "Nay, nay," he would cry, laughingly, "not that way, lad; but this: 'Good my lord, I bring a letter from the duke'—as if thou hadst indeed a letter, see, and not an empty fist. And when thou dost hand it to him, do it thus—and not as if thou wert about

to stab him in the paunch with a cheese-knife!" And at the end he clapped him upon the back and said again and again that he loved him, that he was a dear, sweet figure of a lad, and that his voice, among the rest of England's singers, was like clear honey dropping into a pot of grease.

But it is a long ride from Towcester to St. Albans town in Herts, though the road runs through a pleasant billowy land of oak-walled lanes, wide pastures, and quiet parks; and the steady jog, jog of the little roan began to rack Nick's tired bones before the day was done.

Yet when they marched into the quaint old town to the blare of trumpets and the crash of the kettledrums, all the long line gaudy with the coat-armour of the

Lord High Admiral beneath their flaunting banners, and



"OF WRETCHED BEGGARS AND TATTERED ROGUES THERE WAS AN ENDLESS STRING."

the horses pricked up their ears and arched their necks and pranced along the crowded streets, Nick, stared at by all the good town-folk, could not help feeling a thrill of pride that he was one of the great company of players, and sat up very straight and held his head up haughtily as Master Carew did, and bore himself with as lordly an air as he knew how.

* * * * *

But when morning came, and he danced blithely back from washing himself at the horse-

trough, all ready to start for home, he found the little roan cross-bridled as before between the master-player's gray and the bandy-legged fellow's sorrel mare.

"What, there, cast him loose," said he to the horse-boy who held the three. "I am not going on with the players — I 'm to go back to Stratford."

"Then ye go afoot," coolly rejoined the other, grinning, "for the hoss goeth on wi' the rest."

"What is this, Master Carew?" cried Nick, indignantly, bursting into the tap-room, where the players were at ale. "They will na let me have the horse, sir. Am I to walk the whole way back to Stratford town?"

"To Stratford?" asked Master Carew, staring with an expression of most innocent surprise, as he set his ale-can down, and turned around. "Why, thou art not going to Stratford."

"Not going to Stratford!" gasped Nick, catching at the table with a sinking heart. "Why, sir, ye promised that I should to-day."

"Nay, now, that I did not, Nicholas. I promised thee that thou shouldst go back to-morrow — were not those my very words?"

"Ay, that they were," cried Nick; "and why will ye na leave me go?"

"Why, this is not to-morrow, Nick. Why, see, I cannot leave thee go to-day. Thou knowest that I said to-morrow; and this is not to-morrow — on thine honour, is it now?"

"How can I tell?" cried Nick, despairingly. "Yesterday ye said it would be, and now ye say that it is na. Ye 've twisted it all up so that a body can na tell at all. But there is a falsehood — a wicked, black falsehood — somewhere betwixt you and me, sir; and ye know that I have na lied to you, Master Carew!"

Through the tap-room door he saw the open street and the hills beyond the town. Catching his breath, he sprang across the sill, and ran for the free fields at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT BAY.

"AFTER him! — stop him! — catch the rogue!" cried Carew, running out on the cob-

bles with his ale-can in his hand. "A shilling to the man that brings him back unharmed! No blows, nor clubs, nor stabbing, hark 'e, but catch me the knave straightway; he hath snatched a fortune from my hands!"

At that the hostler, whip in hand, and the tapster with his bit, were off as fast as their legs could carry them, bawling "Stop, thief, stop!" at the top of their lungs; and at their backs every idle varlet about the inn, — grooms, stable-boys, and hangers-on, — ran whooping, howling, and hallooing like wild huntsmen.

Nick's frightened heart was in his mouth, and his breath came quick and sharp. Tap-a-tap, tap-a-tap went his feet on the cobblestones as down the long street he flew, running as he had never run before.

It seemed as if the whole town bellowed at his back; for windows creaked above his head, and doors banged wildly after him; curs from every alley-way came yelping at his heels; apprentices let go the shutter-bars, and joined in the chase; and near and nearer came the cry of "Stop, thief, stop!" and the kloppety-klop of hob-nailed shoes in wild pursuit.

The rabble filled the dark old street from wall to wall, as if a cloud of good-for-naughts had burst above the town; and far in front sped one small, curly-headed lad, running like a frightened fawn. He had lost his cap, and his breath came short, half-sobbing in his throat as the sound of footfalls gained upon his ear; but even yet he might have beaten them all and reached the open fields but for the dirt and garbage in the street. Three times he slipped upon a rancid bacon-rind and almost fell; and the third time, as he plunged across the oozing drain, a dog dashed right between his feet.

He staggered, nearly fell, threw out his hand against the house and saved himself; but as he started on again he saw the town-watch, wakened by the uproar, standing with their long staves at the end of the street, barring the way.

The door of a smithy stood open just ahead, with forge-fires glowing and the hammer ringing on the anvil. Nick darted in, past the horses, hostlers, and blacksmith's boys, and caught at the leather apron of the sturdy smith himself.

"Hoo, man, what a dickens!" snorted he, dropping the red-hot shoe on which he was at

work, and staring like a startled ox at the panting little fugitive.

"Do na leave them take me!" panted Nick. "They ha' stolen me away from Stratford town and will na leave me go!"

At that Will Hostler bolted in, red-faced and scant of wind. "Thou young rascal," quoth he, "I have thee now! Come out o' that!" and he tried to take Nick by the collar.

ously upon Nick, who was dodging around him like a boy at tag around a tree. "Whoy, lad," said he, scratching his puzzled head with his great, grimy fingers, "where hast putten it?"

All the rout and the riot now came plunging into the smithy, breathless with the chase. Master Carew himself, his ale-can still clutched in his hand, and bearing himself with a high air of dignity, followed after them, frowning.



"'NOBODY BREAKS NOBODY'S HEARTS IN OLD JO-OHN SMITHSES SHO-OP,' DRAWLED THE SMITH IN HIS DEEP VOICE; 'NOR STEALS NOBODY, NOTHER.'"

"So-oftly, so-oftly!" rumbled the smith, tweaking up the glowing shoe in his great pincers, and sweeping a sputtering half-circle in front of the cowering lad. "Droive slow through the cro-owd! What hath youngster here did no-ow?"

"He hath stolen a fortune from his master at the Three Lions — and the shilling for him's mine!"

"Hath stealed a fortune? Whoy, huttletytut!" roared the burly smith, turning ponder-

"What?" said he, angrily, "have ye earthed the cub and cannot dig him out? Hast caught him there, fellow?"

"Ay, master, that I have!" shouted Will Hostler. "Shilling's mine, sir."

"Then fetch him out of this hole!" cried Carew, sniffing disdainfully at the low, smoky door.

"But he will na be fetched, master," stammered the doughty Will, keeping a most respectful distance from the long black pincers

and the sputtering shoe with which the farrier stolidly mowed the air around about Nick Attwood and himself.

At that the crowd set up a shout.

Carew thrust fiercely into the press, the louts and loafers giving way. "What, here, Nicholas Attwood," said he, harshly, "come hither."

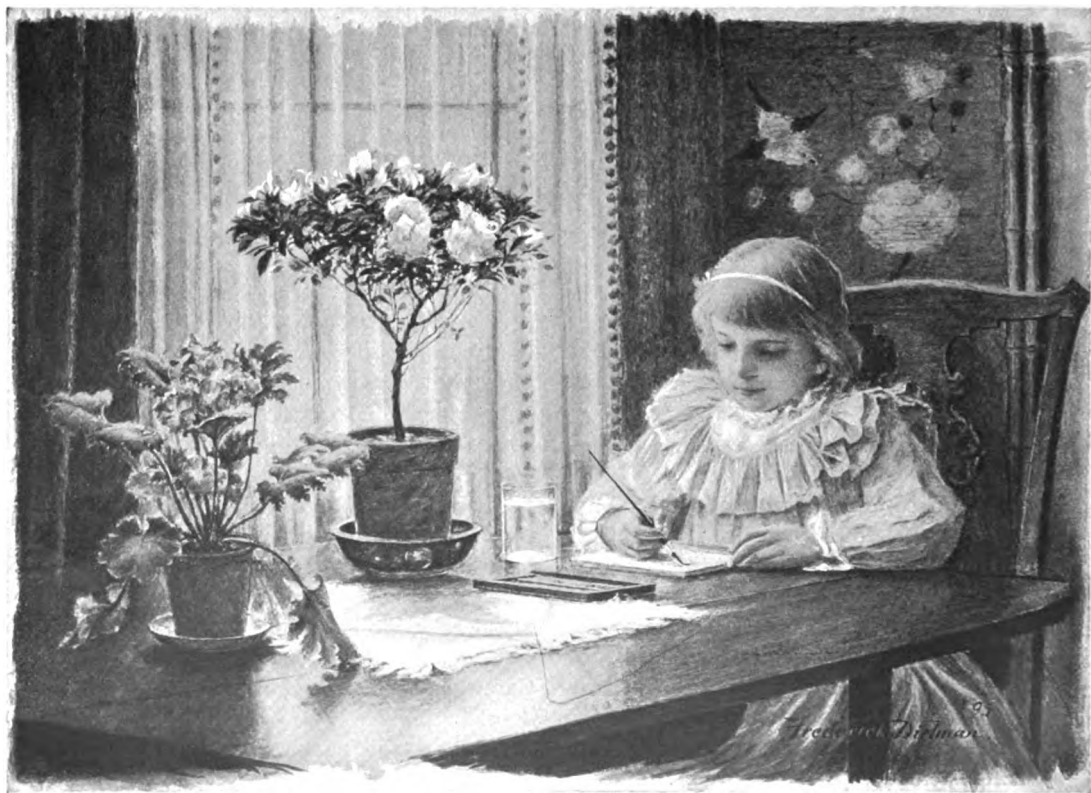
"Do na leave him take me," begged Nick. "He is not my master; I am not bound out apprentice—they are stealing me away from my own home and it will break my mother's heart."

"Nobody breaks nobody's hearts in old Jo-ohn Smithses sho-op," drawled the smith in his deep voice; "nor steals nobody, nother. We be honest-dealing folk in Albans town, an' makes as good horse-shoes as be forged in all England"—and he went placidly on mowing the air with the glimmering shoe.

"Here, fellow, stand aside," commanded Master Carew haughtily. "Stand aside and let me pass!" As he spoke he clapped his hand upon his poniard with a fierce snarl, showing his white teeth like a wolf-hound.

The men about him fell back with unanimous alacrity, making out each to put himself behind the other. But the huge smith only puffed out his sooty cheeks as if to blow a fly off the next bite of cheese: "So-oftly, so-oftly, muster," drawled he; "do na go to ruffling it here. This shop be mine, and I be free-born Englishman. I 'll stand aside for no swash-buckling rogue on my own ground. Come, now, what wilt thou o' the lad?—and speak thee fair, good muster, or thou 'lt get a dab o' the red-hot shoe." As he spoke he gave the black tongs an extra whirl.

(To be continued.)



THE LITTLE WATER-COLORIST.